Army Ethics: Getting back to the basics

MSG Ira L. Russey

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

Class 58

SGM Rodney A. Nicholes

Group Room L09

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Ethics: Getting back to the basics

Introduction

Professional Army ethics is something that is lacking in our noncommissioned officer corps (NCOs). Yes, we have Soldiers that are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan and doing an exceptional job. However, several ethical mishaps occurred that have raised concerns about the ethical behavior of our Soldiers and Marines. The Army has changed tremendously over the last 10 to 12 years as far as the types of missions it is asked to execute, new technology and equipment, and the attention given to cultural awareness.

Lost emphasis on Army values

However, we have lost our ability to conduct ourselves as a moral and ethical professional organization. Transformation is a good thing but, it does not mean that we as noncommissioned officers should stop instilling army values in our Soldiers. The view from my foxhole is that we as NCOs have gotten away from what has made our Soldiers and our Army the best in the world, maintaining discipline and an emphasis on Army values. Growing up in the Army the words duty, honor and country are what guided me to conduct myself morally and ethically. We also have gone away from Be, Know and Do which were words that taught many of us what being an NCO is about. If you attempt to use any of theses six word today one would receive comments such as, we don’t use those anymore, you need to get with the new Army, NCO roles have changed, and those do not apply anymore. I know this because some of these comments have been said to me while attending the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA). I consider myself relevant to what we do as an Army today but, I refuse

to give up what has helped guide me to be the NCO I am today. I am not stuck in a time warp, I still believe in the basics of our time honored profession.

Setting the proper example

As senior NCOs we set the example for our Soldiers to emulate whether that example is good or bad is totally up to us. We must instill the pride that leads Soldiers to believe they are part of a professional organization that seeks the higher ground when it comes to moral and ethical behavior. NCOs all say we set the example but these words seem to be nothing more than the right thing to say and pack little or no punch anymore. NCOs are coming up way short in fulfilling their responsibility as an ethical role model. We have NCOs committing adultery, stealing, robbing, running with gangs, lying, and taking advantage of our young trainees. Has the Army's transformation process and operational tempo ended our ability to do what is right morally and ethically?

Charge to Noncommissioned Officers Corp

Senior NCOs the time has come for us to regain our ethical influential base in our Army furthermore, we must get back in the weeds and ensure that our subordinate leaders are doing the right things. Our subordinate leaders must be made to realize that we as NCOs must provide a clear unwavering example of what a true professional looks and acts like regardless of the situations we may be faced with. The pictures and articles our Soldiers see and read about NCOs being hauled off to jail for possessing pornography and drug trafficking are not the examples of professional ethics we want them to emulate. The Army Values are plastered in every dayroom, school house, and hallway to serve as reminders of our ethical responsibility to the nation, the

Army, and each other. However, they seem to be losing some of their punch because NCOs are not enforcing or putting emphasis on teaching them to their Soldiers. If we are not careful, these values we claim to live by in the Soldiers Creed will join the words Be, Know, Do, Duty, Honor, and Country in the ethical reminder graveyard.

A large part of being a professional Soldier is adhering to the standards and policies established to maintain good order and discipline. We have Sergeant Majors in class 58 that are conducting themselves in ways that are unethical yet, they will be the first to put a Soldier on notice that their behavior is not in compliance with the Army Values. We are the ones whom the responsibility falls on to save the Army's sinking ethical ship. The Army's most senior officers can write all the policies and direct all the mandatory training they want but without a strong disciplined and value based NCO Corps, our Soldiers will repeat the same unethical behavior taught to them by our generation.

Ethical decision are not clear cut black and white, they can be complex and conflicting to ones beliefs. However, being a true professional comes into play. Experience takes over and ones past becomes part of the present, for if one has consistently committed to certain moral actions in the past, it has become a habit and they will make the correct ethical decision. On the other hand if in ones past they have consistently made immoral commitments to certain actions they will as force of habit make the wrong decision. Despite the complexity of the situation one may find themselves in their Soldiers will either be present or word will get back to them and your ethical credibility will grow or be destroyed. NCOs definitely reside in a glass house and we must walk that thin line of right and wrong with steadfast convictions to never let ourselves, our Soldiers,

our Families, our peers, our leaders, the Army, or the nation down. Again we must strive to always be on the high ground when it comes to being a moral and ethical leader.

Despite the new challenges we face in the war on terrorism NCOs must lead the way and ensure that our Soldiers never forget the values that drive us to be the best and most professional military organization in the world. Though we are going through a transformation and the operational tempo is high, we must remain strong and not lose our souls to unethical behavior or actions. We must be better than our enemy(s) even when they conduct themselves in immoral ways. In order for this to happen NCOs must be out front setting the right example.

Conclusion

To my fellow senior NCOs, you are charged to never forget that our subordinate leaders emulate our behavior and actions so we to have to commit to taking the correct moral and ethical decision. The results from this commitment will be a stronger ethical enlisted corps for generations to come. We can fix this problem and leave the Army knowing we made a significant difference. No challenge is to great for the most professional NCO Corps in the history of the world. “No one is more professional than I”